



"Declaration of Independence"

from www.kidsgrowth.com

Erma Bombeck said of adolescents: "Bury Them at 12 and Dig Them Up at 21." She was just joking, but perhaps you are finding your child's teen years more than you bargained for.

Nothing in life can prepare parents for the experiences they are about to have with their 12-year-old. What a roller-coaster life it will be for everyone. Your adolescent bounces between childhood and adulthood, being irresponsible and responsible, testing parental authority and then depending on it.

Parents often do not know what to expect and many adults find it difficult to understand the adolescent's growing need for independent action, and even for rebellion. But remember, no one has died from adolescence, most parents and their children get through it intact and much of what you hear and see in the media is greatly exaggerated. Many parents look back and can chuckle.

Parenting and Behavioral

- Dramatic physical changes are the hallmark of early adolescence and these physical changes are important to your adolescent. They signify that he or she is developing like his or her peers. Generally, girls begin puberty an average of two years earlier than boys. During early adolescence, most girls experience a rapid growth spurt, changes in fat distribution, and the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as pubic hair and breasts. For most boys, the early adolescent period marks only the beginning of the biological changes of puberty, with increased abdominal fat deposits, testicular growth, voice changes and the development of acne, pubic hair and nocturnal emissions. Since many young adolescents are unaware that the onset and rate of puberty vary greatly, they need reassurance that their own growth and development are normal, and they will benefit from learning about the progression of physiological changes.
- Many young adolescents, preoccupied with their attractiveness, will try to change their appearance through dieting or consumer fad food products. Anorexia and bulimia may occur especially among females. Some males use supplements and steroids for bodybuilding. While some teens exercise regularly and develop bodies that are extremely fit, others remain sedentary and have poor physical fitness. These behaviors are often predictors of fitness habits later in life.
- Most 12-year-olds focus on social life, friends and school. They continue friendships with members of the same sex. Sometimes, a teenager's best friend becomes a parent substitute and confidante. These friendships, however, may change abruptly, causing hurt feelings.
- Teens need to learn to respect the rights and needs of others. They should follow family rules, such as those for curfews, television viewing, and chores, and share in household chores.
- Parents need to serve as a positive ethical and behavioral role model.
- School activities are important in the life of a 12-year-old adolescent. Social activities often center around sports events. Teens meet together in groups or pairs.
- Parents should learn the signs of adolescent depression and drug abuse!

Characteristics of "teen friendly" parents:

- Understands the normal growth and development of adolescents.
- Praises, approves, supports and shows interest in their adolescent. Attends events in which their son or daughter is a participant.
- Encourages reasonable independence, friendships and interests outside of the home.
- Finds time to be with and listen to the adolescent.

- Establishes realistic expectations for family rules and enforces them, with increasing responsibility given to the adolescent.
- Establishes and communicates clear limits and consequences for breaking rules. Does not repeatedly warn or threaten. Simply follows the protocol already agreed upon and is consistent.
- Is present at home or makes arrangements for the adolescent's supervision in the parent's absence.
- Assigns chores around the home and provides an allowance.
- Demonstrates interest in the adolescent's school activities and emphasizes the importance of school.
- Takes pleasure in their son's or daughter's abilities and achievements.
- Trusts the adolescent and understands what he or she is experiencing.
- Respects the adolescent's privacy.
- Does not criticize the other parent. A teen needs to love and respect both parents.
- Enhances the adolescent's self-esteem by providing praise and recognizing positive behavior and achievements.
- Minimizes criticism, nagging, derogatory comments and other belittling or demeaning messages.
- Does not try to be the teens best friend. Remembers that their role is to teach and parent.
- Shows respect for their teen. Listens to the adolescent's side without interrupting or judging.
- Gets to know their teen's friends, and avoids making quick judgments based on appearances only. Whenever possible, avoids downgrading his or her friends.
- Encourages their son or daughter to invite peers home.
- Allows their son or daughter to make age-appropriate decisions and selections (for example, choosing clothes).
- Involves their teen in decision making regarding their role in family chores, supervision of younger sibling, etc.
- Assumes a role in the teen's sex education, perhaps with the help of books recommended by the physician.

Traits of the adolescent who is doing well:

- Believes that he or she will do well.
- Has self-confidence and a sense of pride and competence.
- Enjoys close interactions with peers (especially same-sex friendships).
- Enjoys recreational activities.
- Recognizes the need for rules and fair play.
- Is energetic, enthusiastic and vital.
- Has reasonable athletic ability, or has dramatic, artistic or musical talents.
- Does well in school or performs at or near ability in school.
- Takes appropriate responsibility for homework with little prodding.
- Assumes responsibility for his or her own health.
- Is comfortable in asking parents questions.
- Generally cooperative and considerate, although at times is inconsistent and unpredictable.

Oral Health for the Adolescent

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste, and floss daily.
- Take fluoride supplements as recommended by the health professional based on the level of fluoride in your drinking water.
- Ask the health professional any questions you have about how to handle dental emergencies, especially the loss or fracture of a tooth.
- Schedule a dental appointment every six months, unless your dentist determines otherwise based on your adolescent's individual needs/susceptibility to disease.
- As your permanent molars erupt, ensure your dentist evaluates them for application of dental sealants.
- Do not smoke or use chewing tobacco.

Nutrition for the Adolescent

12-year-olds seem to eat continuously and appetite rarely is a problem. Unfortunately, many 12- and 13-year-olds consume fast foods daily. They eat snacks that are high in calories and fat.

- Your adolescent child should eat three meals per day. Breakfast is especially important. Do your best to make sure he or she has a nutritious breakfast daily.
- Choose a variety of healthy foods.
- Choose nutritious snacks rich in complex carbohydrates. Limit high-fat or low-nutrient foods and beverages such as candy, chips or soft drinks.
- Choose plenty of fruits and vegetables; breads, cereals and other grain products; low-fat dairy products; lean meats; and foods prepared with little or no fat. Include foods *rich in calcium and iron* in your child's diet. Girls may suffer anemia at this time so make sure they are receiving sufficient iron in their diet to replace menstrual losses.
- Select a nutritious meal from the school cafeteria or pack a balanced lunch.
- At this age it is especially important to evaluate your 12-year old's food consumption in relation to the amount of exercise he or she does. Obesity can be a problem in 12- and 13-year-olds. Studies have shown that children who are overweight at this age group have a greater chance of being overweight as an adult. Achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Manage weight through appropriate eating habits and regular exercise.

Sleep

- You may think that your 12-year old "sleeps" his or her life away (especially on weekends), but many children this age are actually sleep-deprived. Children this age need nine-10 hours of sleep per night. Lost sleep can not be made up later.

Immunizations

Since immunization schedules vary from doctor to doctor, and new vaccines may have been introduced, it is always best to seek the advice of your child's health care provider concerning your child's vaccine schedule.

- Most children have received the following vaccines and no immunizations are usually given at this age. All 12 year olds should have had:
 - 5 doses of DtaP
 - 4 doses of IPV (polio)
 - 4 doses of HiB
 - 1 dose of Chickenpox vaccine
 - 4 doses of Prevnar vaccine (if born after 1999)
 - 3 doses of Hepatitis B vaccine
 - 2 doses of MMR vaccine

Annual flu vaccines for children with chronic illnesses like asthma and heart defects. Check with your doctor.

Vision and hearing, as well as blood and urine, are usually checked at this visit. Other screening done at this age may include a tuberculin test (if indicated) and blood pressure. If there is a family history of elevated cholesterol, some physicians will also obtain a screening blood test.

Measure and plot on a standard chart the adolescent's height and weight. Determine the body mass index (BMI). If an adolescent has a BMI greater than the 95th percentile for age and gender, or less than the 5th percentile, refer for dietary assessment and counseling. Adolescents with a BMI between the 85th and 95th percentile need initial evaluation and counseling for obesity.

The physician and his or her staff, as well as the parents, should respect the child's privacy by using appropriate draping during the 12-year examination.

Sexuality for the Adolescent

- Find a supportive adult who can give you accurate information about sex.

- Ask your doctor about any questions you have about body changes during puberty, including variations from individual to individual.
- Ask any questions you have about birth control or sexually transmitted diseases.
- Having sexual feelings is normal, but you should wait to have sex.
- Not having sexual intercourse is the safest way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection/AIDS.
- Learn about ways to say no to sex.

Say "No" to substance use/abuse

- Do not smoke, use smokeless tobacco, drink alcohol, or use drugs, diet pills or steroids. Do not become involved in selling drugs.
- If you smoke, discuss smoking cessation with the health professional.
- Avoid situations where drugs or alcohol are easily available.
- Support friends who choose not to use tobacco, alcohol, drugs, steroids, or diet pills.
- Become a peer counselor to prevent substance abuse.

Safety advice for the Adolescent

- Wear a seat belt in the car.
- Learn how to swim.
- Do not drink alcohol, especially while boating or swimming.
- Protect yourself from skin cancer by putting sunscreen on before you go outside for long periods of time.
- Ask your parents to test smoke detectors to ensure they work properly and to change batteries yearly.
- Discuss with your parents safety rules for the home, including those about visitors, use of the telephone and what to do in case of fire or other emergencies. Conduct fire drills at home.
- Always wear a helmet when on a motorcycle, in an all-terrain vehicle, or riding a bicycle. Even with a helmet, motorcycles and ATVs are very dangerous.
- Wear protective sports gear such as a mouth guard or a face protector.
- Wear appropriate protective gear at work and follow job safety procedures.
- Avoid high noise levels, especially in music headsets.
- Do not accept rides from or attempt to hitchhike with strangers.
- Do not carry or use a weapon of any kind.
- Develop skills in conflict resolution, negotiation and dealing with anger constructively.
- Learn techniques to protect yourself from physical, emotional and sexual abuse, including rape by either strangers or acquaintances. Immediately seek help if you are physically or sexually abused or fear that you are in danger.
- Parents should supervise possible hazardous activities, such as use of power tools or participating in water sports

Health Promotion

- Get adequate sleep.
- Exercise vigorously at least three times per week. Encourage friends and family members to exercise.
- Discuss with a health professional or your coach about athletic conditioning, weight training, fluids and weight gain or loss.
- Limit television viewing to an average of one hour per day.

The information presented in Growth Milestones was obtained with the help of our pediatric experts and with material from The American Academy of Pediatrics' Guidelines for Health Supervision and Bright Futures' Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents. Bright Futures is supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.